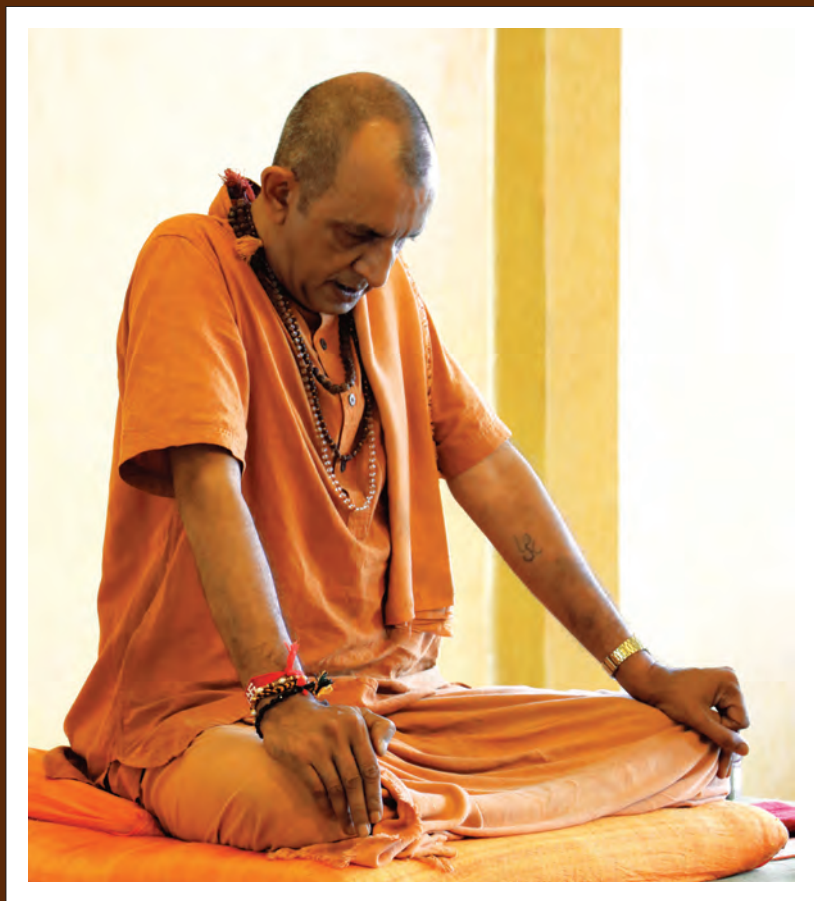


Hatha Yoga Yatra 3

Understanding Mudra and Bandha

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Hatha Yoga Yatra 3

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

Hatha Yoga Yatra 3

Understanding Mudra and Bandha

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Discourses given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati
during the training of Hatha Yoga Yatra 3: Mudra and Bandha,
held at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth,
Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, from 22nd to 28th April 2018.*



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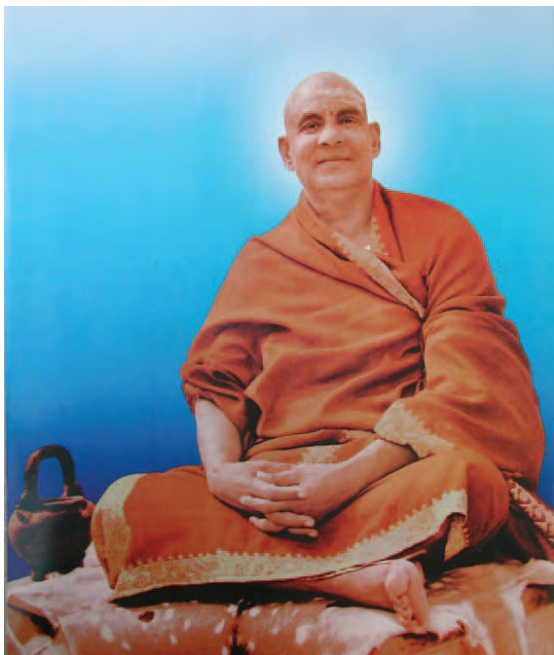
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

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Preface:

The 2nd Chapter of Yoga

Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati established the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963, in order to fulfil the mandate of his guru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati. The mandate Swami Satyananda received was to propagate the science of yoga and take yoga from “shore to shore and door to door”. In the days of Swami Sivananda, yoga was far from the globally recognized and accepted word it is today. Yoga was considered a spiritual practice reserved for sannyasins and renunciates who had renounced society and were seeking enlightenment. It was not seen as something that could be incorporated into society and practised by the general public.

When the Bihar School of Yoga was established, the philosophy, practices, applications and lifestyle of yoga as practical and scientific systems were unknown, even in Indian society. From the beginning, yoga training and propagation by the Bihar School of Yoga took the form of intensive residential programs, in which yoga was taught as a way to qualitatively enhance physical health, mental peace, emotional harmony. A sequence of progression in yoga was defined fifty years ago by Swami Satyananda, by giving systematic training first in hatha yoga, raja yoga, and kriya yoga, as *bahiranga yoga*, external yoga. Simultaneously, training in *antaranga*, internal, aspect of karma yoga, bhakti and jnana yoga was provided through the lifestyle and inspiration of the ashram environment. A holistic or integral yoga system developed in which the yoga aspirant

could awaken and integrate the faculties of head, heart and hands. The different *angas*, limbs, of yoga become the means of attaining this personal harmony and integrated expression.

In the early 1940s, the subject of yoga was propagated across the world by teachers and masters of different traditions, introducing the idea that through the practice of yoga one could explore the body, mind, emotions, and have a glimpse into one's spiritual nature. The first-generation teachers focused on bringing the knowledge of yoga to human society according to the need of the society at that time. In the 1960s, yoga was seen as a physical culture. In the 1970s, it was seen as a way to overcome stress, anxiety, tension and to improve the physical and mental functions. In the 1980s, research into the various possibilities and potentials of yoga to assist and promote physical and mental health took the forefront. By the 1990s, a rapid increase in the popularity of the practice of asana was evident across the globe. The asana component of yoga had been accepted worldwide and other components of yoga were relegated to the background and largely ignored by the mainstream practitioners and majority of yoga teachers. Today, 28 million people are practising yoga in the United States alone and statistics estimate 300 million practitioners worldwide.

In 2013, the World Yoga Convention was conducted in Munger to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga. Over 50,000 yoga practitioners, teachers, students and aspirants participated in this historic event either in person or through the internet. The Convention was a milestone that marked the completion of fifty years of yoga propagation. The mandate of taking yoga from shore to shore and door to door was fulfilled. Over a fifty-year period, with the help of yoga aspirants and well-wishers all over the world, a yogic renaissance had taken place. The chapter of yoga propagation was complete and when one chapter closed, the next chapter opened.

Thus the World Yoga Convention also heralded the beginning of the second chapter of the Bihar School of Yoga.

The hallmark of this second chapter is a new vision of yoga not as a practice but as a *vidya*, a wisdom to be understood, imbibed and expressed in life. This understanding of the fundamental need for integral development was the vision of Swami Satyananda, which he imparted and taught through the concept of the *yoga chakra*, or the wheel of yoga.

The second chapter of the Bihar School of Yoga and the teachings which are being presented are not concerned with propagation of the practices of yoga. Isolated practices of yoga do not bring about the qualitative change and spiritual evolution intended and envisaged by the seers. The transcendence of the negative and restricting conditions and the real evolution and growth of the personality takes place only when the *vidya* of yoga is comprehended, absorbed and realized.

The profundity of yogic understanding must increase and the depths of yoga must be fathomed, if the *vidya* is to be realized and maintained for future generations. The experience and wisdom of accomplished yogis and spiritual scientists is recorded in the scriptural and classical texts detailing each *anga* of yoga. The second chapter teachings are a progressive effort to discern and elucidate the experiences and realizations of the ancient seers, within the blueprint of the *yoga chakra*.

For individual aspirants, the challenge of the second chapter is to deepen the understanding and experience of yoga. Practice is merely an introduction to yoga, which is limited by personal motivation and constraints. The *yoga vidya* dimension is accessed only when one moves from practice to *sadhana* and makes a sincere effort to experience the aims defined by the different *angas* of yoga. Until that sincerity awakens, the commitment to adhere to the system and the *vidya* of yoga is lacking. With sincerity, seriousness and commitment, each aspirant has to accept responsibility for their own development and betterment in life.

Ultimately, yoga is a lifestyle. It is not a practice. For, once the yogic principles are imbibed and become part of life, the attitudes, perceptions, interactions, the mind, actions and

behaviours will improve. To meet the challenge of the second chapter, the expressive and the behavioural components of yoga, the antaranga and the bahiranga aspects, have to come together. When head, heart and hands unite, an ordinary moment can become divine. An ordinary life can become a divine life.

An Introduction to Mudra and Bandha

22 April 2018



In the first Hatha Yoga Yatra we had covered the subject of shatkarma, the cleansing techniques. In the second training we covered asana and pranayama. Now, in the third Hatha Yoga Yatra, we shall be covering the aspect of mudra and bandha.

The first Hatha Yoga Yatra was devoted to shatkarma, and that is how yoga begins. Yoga does not begin with the practice of asana and pranayama. The classical style started

with the cleansing techniques. These were the first practices that people had to undergo in the practice of yoga. The purpose of the cleansing techniques was to detoxify the body, to balance the humours of the body, kapha, vata and pitta, to make the body lighter and more flexible and prepare it for the practice of asana and pranayama.

The second module was on asana and pranayama. Asanas of hatha yoga and asanas of raja yoga are different from each other. Raja yoga does not mention how many asanas there are; it only gives a broad and open definition of the word asana: a posture in which you are comfortable and steady. From this perspective, asana can be any posture of the body in which you are free from tension and tightness, and are comfortable and steady. The asanas of hatha yoga are more dynamic in nature. In fact, we can classify asanas in two categories: *gatyatmak*, the dynamic practices which belong to hatha yoga; *sthairyatmak*, the steady postures which belong to raja yoga.

In the *gatyatmak* or dynamic practices of hatha yoga, different texts have selected different numbers of postures. For example, in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the number of asanas are not many, a group of fifteen practices. In the *Gheranda Samhita* the number of asanas does not exceed thirty-two. In other texts of hatha yoga also you will find that the number of asanas does not exceed twenty or thirty. If we compile all the practices of hatha yoga from the various known scriptures, the number will not be more than seventy or eighty at the most. These seventy to eighty postures are the dynamic or *gatyatmak* practices of hatha yoga.

The focus of hatha yoga, apart from the physical component, is also pranic. It can be said that hatha yoga deals with the physical body, the pranic body and the mental body: the *annamaya kosha*, the *pranamaya kosha* and the *manomaya kosha*. Asanas and the cleansing techniques are the practices for the physical body, *annamaya kosha*. Pranayama, mudras and bandhas are practices for the body of energy, *pranamaya kosha*. Trataka and pratyahara

techniques are practices for the mind, *manomaya kosha*. Therefore, hatha yoga deals with the first three levels of human experience. The aim of hatha yoga is to give control over the functions of the solar energy and the lunar energy, the vital force and the mental force, *prana shakti* and *chitta shakti*.

The word 'hatha' is also composed of two mantras: *Ham* and *Tham*. *Ham* is the bija mantra of the solar energy and *Tham* or *Ksham* is the bija mantra of the lunar energy. The logo of the Bihar School of Yoga is ajna chakra, on one petal is written *Ham*, on the other petal is written *Ksham*, and they represent hatha yoga. Ajna chakra and the mantras on it represent the achievement of hatha yoga where the ida and pingala nadis are in perfect balance and harmony.

Mudras: happiness of pranic balance

What are mudras and what are bandhas? Mudras are simple postures of the body, postures of fingers, hands, eyes, neck and stomach that alter the flow of prana shakti. When you do the Shanti Path, you bring the index finger and the thumb together in a hand mudra. By placing the fingers in this manner you are creating an energy circuit in the body so that energy is not wasted; instead, it is reinvested in the body. Mudras and bandhas work more specifically with the pranic body.

Kirlian photography is a system where a body part is photographed with special equipment and the picture shows the energy emission of that body part. Generally, energy is discharged from the extremities of the body: the hands, the fingers, the toes, the soles of the feet, the buttocks. In Kirlian photography, the electromagnetic field that surrounds the whole body and which many people call 'aura', becomes visible. This energy emission has different colours and lengths, each representing a particular condition of the physical body. If the colour of the energy emission is blue, strong and even, it indicates you have a healthy body. If the colour is yellow, orange or ashen, it indicates that there are

imbalances in different parts of the body. The colour can also represent a particular organ of the body which is affected.

With the practice of mudras and bandhas, you redirect the electromagnetic discharge back into the body. The meaning of the word ‘mudra’ indicates this process. It is derived from the root *mud*, which means to be happy. Mudra is a practice in which the pranic systems are properly aligned and balanced, and therefore a sense of happiness and joy takes over the whole personality. Mudra is re-balancing, re-channelling, re-directing the energy emission to harmonize the prana shakti. With this, a sense of euphoria, happiness and joy is experienced.

Mudras are followed by another set of practices known as bandhas. *Bandha* means lock and there are only three of them. The first bandha is the lock of mooladhara chakra and is known as moola bandha. The second lock is that of manipura chakra and it is known as uddiyana bandha. The third lock is that of vishuddhi chakra and it is known as jalandhara bandha. The three bandhas in conjunction with mudras constitute a set of practices that re-balance the pranic system.

Categories of mudras

Mudras can be defined as expressions, attitudes, or subtle physical postures and methods by which the senses are introverted. In the classical Indian systems, there are many different types of mudras. There are *natya mudras*, mudras that are used in dance. The different expressions of the eyes, hands, fingers and the face tell the story of the dance. Similarly, there are *chikitsatmak mudras*, healing or therapeutic mudras. For example, if there is a problem in the heart, a blockage or angina pain, you can practise hridaya mudra and find relief. There are many therapeutic mudras which affect specific parts of the body and bring about healing by influencing the pranamaya kosha.

There are pranic mudras which divert the flow of prana shakti. Jnana mudra and chin mudra, for example, come in

this category. There are pratyahara mudras which induce the state of pratyahara, such as bhoochari, shambhavi and nasikagra mudras. In this manner, there are various classifications of mudras. In our practice, we are concerned with mudras that have found mention in the yogic literatures, and these are mainly meditative and pranic mudras. Just like asana, if all the mudras found in the various scriptures in relation to yoga are compiled together, they will not number more than fifty.

Locking and releasing the energy with bandhas

The three bandhas work specifically at the chakra level, the psychic body, the *vijnanamaya kosha*. When practising moola bandha, the whole region around the mooladhara chakra is compressed and tightened. Then, when you release the bandha, a sponge-like effect takes place. If you tighten any muscle and then relax it, it behaves like a sponge. The flow of blood increases in that region and there is more oxygenation. The sensory and the motor cortex also fire more neurons when you practise a bandha. If there is mastery and perfection, even the autonomic body functions can be affected. There are yogis who are able to control the heartbeat; they can stop the heartbeat for up to one hour. They have perfected the bandhas.



Out of the seven chakras in the body, four chakras – mooladhara, manipura, vishuddhi and ajna – are the centres where maximum pranic work takes place. Manipura or the navel centre is the generation centre of prana shakti. Mooladhara is the storage centre of prana shakti. Vishuddhi chakra expands the prana shakti to cover the psychological dimension, the akasha tattwa. Ajna is the distribution or transmission centre of prana shakti.

Moola bandha stimulates mooladhara into action. Even the most depressive person will become highly stimulated with the practice of moola bandha, as it stimulates the prana shakti in mooladhara chakra. Manipura chakra is the manufacturing centre of prana shakti; uddiyana bandha will lock the manipura chakra. Jalandhara bandha will lock vishuddhi and activate ajna.

In addition, when mooladhara is locked, a surge of energy takes place in swadhisthana chakra and activates it. The tensing and releasing action of uddiyana bandha stimulates manipura chakra, the manufacturing centre of prana shakti. During the bandha, when manipura chakra becomes locked, the energy surges to anahata and activates it. Similarly, jalandhara bandha both activates and locks vishuddhi and activates ajna. When the three bandhas are released one after another, a natural upward flow of energy takes place in the lower chakras and a downward flooding of energy takes place from ajna chakra. In this way, the bandhas relate to the chakras and specifically act on the generation, storage and distribution centres of prana shakti.

During this training, we shall try to understand mudras and bandhas in depth, along with developing an awareness of the psychic dimension of human nature. This will be the Hatha Yoga Yatra that we shall undertake in the coming days.

Retuning the Pranic Body

23 April 2018



In yoga, there is the concept of *pancha kosha* or five bodies. The first is the physical body, *annamaya kosha*; the second is the energy body, *pranamaya kosha*.

Pranamaya kosha is so broad and wide that it provides an access route to all the other bodies. Imagine the gears in a car: first, second, third, fourth, reverse, and there is also the neutral gear. It is coming into neutral that allows you to shift to either a higher gear or a lower gear. Just as neutral becomes the means to shift up or down, pranamaya kosha becomes the medium through which you shift from annamaya, the matter, to the subtle dimensions of manomaya, vijnanamaya and anandamaya.

Mudras: natural postures of the body

Hatha yoga deals with the techniques or systems of yoga that regulate the energy system in the body. The focus of hatha yoga is to provide balance to the lunar and solar forces, *Ham* and *Tham*. In this context, mudras and bandhas form part of hatha yoga, they do not form part of raja yoga or any other yoga. They are specifically part of hatha yoga.

The word 'mudra' is related to many ideas. It is related to money; money is called mudra. It is related to grains; what you eat is also called mudra. Food is mudra, money is mudra, happiness of mind is mudra. In this manner, there are many definitions of the word mudra. From the yogic perspective, mudra is something that connects the senses with the pranic body and the pranic body with the higher bodies, therefore they are also known as attitudes.

There is a mudra called *adi mudra*, which means the first or original mudra. When a child is born, what is its hand position? A child does not take birth with its fingers in the mouth. It holds its hand in a fist with the thumb inside. This is *adi mudra*. The benefit of this mudra is that it opens the lungs. When you hold your hand in a tight fist, the pressure that you are creating on the palm opens the lungs and allows the pranic interaction to take place with this material organ. Children are born with this mudra, as they require their lungs to become active in order to breathe properly. You will also find people making this mudra when they are angry and lashing out at somebody. They will make a fist with the

hands to punch another person in the face. That is again to improve the breathing; the moment you tighten your hands, your respiration improves and you can add more force to your punches.

This example shows that mudras are also natural movements or postures the body adopts unconsciously to create a change in the pranic and limbic systems.

Mudras and neuroplasticity

Emotions are prana shakti. They are not thoughts or logical behaviour, they are explosive and uncontrolled behaviours of prana shakti. The instinctive or raw emotions come up in the amygdala, the primitive brain, and are processed in the frontal lobe, the evolved part of the brain. Once the information of the emotion is processed in the frontal lobe, you can either control it or give vent to it. However, if it has not been processed then it is only a strong reaction, and there is no possibility of controlling it.

The emotions or moods alter the chemicals in the brain. Anger, fear, greed, joy, all these emotions alter the brain chemicals; every mood that you undergo changes the brain chemicals. Swami Sivananda said, “The application of *pratipaksha bhavana*, bringing a positive thought to the forefront, allows you to change cerebral behaviour.” What he was referring to is neuroplasticity. If you experience a negative emotion, it builds up without any effort on your part. A negative thought, once generated, will keep on chugging in the background for all times to come. The continuous identification with that negative thought creates a specific type of cerebral behaviour.

Swami Sivananda said, “Change the negative into a positive.” You were creating a complex of negative neurotransmitters in your brain, now you can alter it into something positive and constructive. You are not allowing the negative to be built-up in your brain. Instead, whenever a negative is built-up, you are changing it to something positive. This is working on the principles of neuroplasticity.

Mudras create neuroplasticity. During the practice of mudras, the neuronal pathways of unconscious reflexes and instinctive patterns of habit that originate in the primitive brain are connected with the frontal lobe, bringing them under conscious control. Therefore, unconscious neuroses, complexes, fears, phobias, etc. come to consciousness and are dissolved. They can then be replaced with new, creative and positive habits and patterns of thinking. In fact, with the regular practice of mudras, larger areas of the brain that are normally dormant can be activated in a harmonious and controlled way.

Types of mudras

Mudras work by creating pranic circuits and influencing the pranic flows. Prana is accessed in two ways: one is through the chakras and the other is through specific flows. The chakras represent the bigger body of prana shakti and specific flows represent singular flows of vital energy through one of the meridians or nadis. The mudra practices begin with accessing the major centres of pranic energy, the chakras. Once you are able to sensitize yourself to chakras, you move into specifics: altering, changing, directing or focusing the flow of a single passage, meridian or nadi.

People focus only on asana and pranayama and are not aware of the science of mudras. They only know of chin and jnana mudra, which they use during meditative practices. However, the progression and learning of mudras begins with *kaya mudras*, postural mudras. These are mudras involving postures with focus on breathing, concentration, chakra visualization and mantra awareness. Many aspects are grouped together to create the opening of chakras in these mudras.

Another group of mudras is known as *bandha mudras*, lock mudras. In many of the ancient texts, the bandhas were considered a part of mudras and were called bandha mudras. This category also includes practices that combine mudra and bandha, such as maha mudra, maha bheda mudra and maha vedha mudra. These mudras also work on chakras.

There are other categories of mudras that work with specific flows or circuits of energy. These are *hasta mudras* or hand mudras, *shirsha mudras* or head mudras, and *adhara mudras* or base mudras.

All these mudras are part of yoga and are recognized as yoga mudras. However, mudras are also used in other classical systems of India such as therapy, dance, worship.

The therapy or chikitsa mudras have a lot of similarity with the acupuncture/acupressure systems. Both work on the principle of influencing the energy flow through the nadis or meridians to the body organ or part that has to be treated. In fact, historically, one system has supported the other: when the nadi system of India went to China, it became the meridian system.

If you look at the nadis or meridians in the hands, you will find that every extremity or fingertip has a nadi going into it. When you bring two of them together, you are creating a circuit. The flow of prana is now rotating in this circuit, creating a specific flow in a meridian to affect a specific organ of the body. For example, *hridaya mudra* or the mudra for the heart is simple: you place the index finger at the base of the thumb, then bring the tips of the thumb, the middle and the ring fingers together and press hard. By doing this, you can relieve pressure from the heart and overcome heart problems, as the circuit you are creating specifically focuses on the functions of the heart; that meridian is affecting the functions of the heart. In this way, chikitsa mudras or therapy mudras work on different physical conditions.

Stimulation of minor chakras

Mudras have also been observed to activate the dormant centres of the brain that are not covered by the chakra system. The concept of bindu becomes prominent in the context of mudras. Bindu visarga is not on the list of the seven chakras consisting of mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna and sahasrara. Two specific minor chakras or sub-chakras are talked about when dealing with mudras:

bindu visarga, at the top back of the head where the hair goes into a whorl, and lalana chakra, above the throat centre.

The access to these two chakras is created through mudras. In khechari mudra, the tongue is folded back and inserted into the upper throat cavity. At that point there is a nerve centre, lalana, which is connected to bindu. Once the stimulation takes place at lalana, the pathway to bindu is also stimulated and the chemical secreted by bindu comes into this centre. This changes its property as it passes down the throat to vishuddhi. That chemical is responsible for cellular rejuvenation. If it is utilized in the right manner, the body will not grow old; decay and death will not touch the body. Normally, this secretion continues to fall unimpeded and is consumed by the fires of digestion in manipura. Once it is consumed by the fires of digestion, the body becomes subject to decay, old age, cellular degeneration and death. If, with the practice of khechari mudra, you are able to hold the drops in the upper regions and not allow it to fall down to the navel centre, then you attain mastery over death and decay.

With nasikagra mudra you stimulate another minor chakra, which is at the tip of the nose. Yet another minor chakra is at the ear lobes, which is connected to the respiratory system. In the olden days in India, when children were born they would undergo a ceremony called *karnabhedan*, piercing of the ears. The purpose was stimulation of this chakra. In fact, people who have pierced their ears will suffer less from respiratory problems than those who have not. One of the asthma therapies is piercing of the ears. This reduces asthmatic attacks by activating the nadi that affects the lungs.

Mudras enhance the understanding of the chakras. They also provide an awareness of the chemical secretions of chakras and how to use them for rejuvenation of the body. Although the practices and techniques are simple, their reach is far and deep. If they can be mastered, then definitely one can experience the anandamaya kosha. This is not an abstract idea, it is an aspect of neuropsychology. The whole science

of mudras is in fact the science of neuropsychology. You are altering your mind, your prana, your physical behaviour, your mood through the practice of mudras. These intricate processes come about by the simple practices of mudras and create a deep change in the nature.

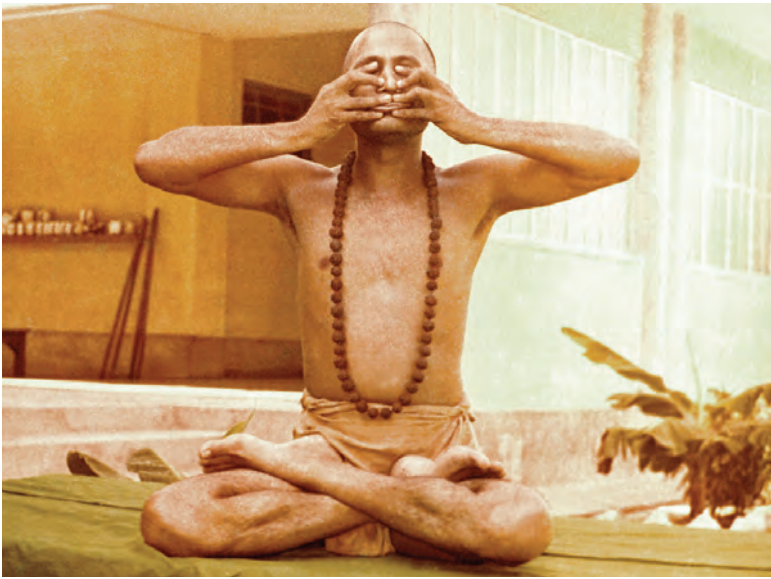
Mudras in yoga

In yoga there are about twenty-six mudras. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* mentions nine mudras. The *Gheranda Samhita* speaks of sixteen mudra practices. It is interesting that in the *Gheranda Samhita*, a text meant for renunciates, the number of mudras is almost double of that in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, a text meant for householders. For householders only nine, but for renunciates it is sixteen mudras. The difference is that the higher mudras, in particular the head mudras that activate the psychic centres, are not taught to householders. They are only taught to renunciates.

In his teachings Sri Swamiji speaks of twenty-five mudras, including *dhyana mudras*, meditative mudras. When you sit down in meditation and gradually introvert the awareness and try to create inner harmony, it is a natural tendency of the body to assume postures that allow this process to take place. You might have noticed that many times in meditation you experience involuntary body movements. You could be sitting with your eyes closed and suddenly there is an involuntary body movement, and it seems to be natural, it does not feel strange. You find your head turning or the arms rising up. These involuntary body movements take place due to pranic activation. There are times when you spontaneously make gestures with your hands that are like the dance mudras. You do that in order to allow the prana to expand. In this way, any body movement that accesses and activates the pranic body is a mudra. The ancient yogis understood the intricacy and depth of this process and created the whole science of mudras.

Interaction of Matter, Energy and Mind

24 April 2018



Sri Swami Satyananda used to tell a story from his days at Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh. He used to have a recurrent dream of a city with houses, apartments, roads, yet everything in total darkness, no light and no human population. He could not understand it. One day during satsang, he presented a question to Swami Sivananda, “I have a frequent dream in which I only see construction but no electricity and no human population. What is it?” Swami Sivananda looked

at him and said, “You are looking at your own brain. The brain is like the city of your dream: everything is constructed there yet there is no electricity and no human population. If you are able to provide electricity to the brain, to your city, then the lights will come on, the city will become illuminated and people will come to live in that city.”

Swami Satyananda could not understand the answer at that time and remained quiet. Many years later, he realized the significance of what Swami Sivananda had told him. The brain is wired up, yet we use only a portion of our brain power. Approximately one-tenth of the brain potential is used and the remaining is wired yet remains unused.

Significance of the pranic body

From the yogic perspective, the brain is a material body, it is matter; however, it functions and is activated due to electrical impulses which are non-matter, which are energy or prana shakti. As these electrical transmissions take place and activate different brain centres, images, words, ideas and thoughts are formed due to that interaction. This is recognized as the mental function. There is interaction of three things: matter, energy, and the product of it which is the mind. Matter is annamaya kosha, energy is pranamaya kosha and what emerges from that is manomaya kosha. In one container there are three components. Pranamaya kosha is like the neutral gear of the car, while annamaya is the first gear, manomaya is the second gear, vijñanamaya is the third gear and anandamaya is the fourth gear. You have to use the agency of prana to move from annamaya to higher levels of experience in manomaya, vijñanamaya and anandamaya.

The pranic body is much more extensive than the other bodies. The physical body is limited, the mental body is limited, the psychic body is limited, but the pranic body covers everything and has an important role. It maintains the balance and harmony of the annamaya and manomaya activities. If you remove the prana, then annamaya and manomaya will become separated and there will not be any life.

The senses, muscles, organs and other body systems create stress and tension while they are functioning. They are also balanced by prana shakti. As long as prana shakti is there, you will not feel tired, you will be able to walk ten thousand steps a day. In the absence of prana shakti, you will feel exhausted on walking one hundred steps. The muscles, the bones, the joints will all feel tired. Therefore, the pranic body is considered to be the most important body, more important than the annamaya. Of course, the annamaya body is required to fulfil your duties, whether personal or social. However, the pranic body is required to live, to survive. Without it the physical body will become vegetative. Without it the mind will go into a limbo, as happens in the state of coma.

The pranic body is accessed by understanding what the chakras are and what they represent. The prana in the pranic body is re-channelled and redirected with the practice of mudras and bandhas. The pranic tensions are reduced and the pranic capacity increased with the practice of prana nidra. Prana is converted into a healing force and used as a healing power with the practice of prana vidya. All these practices access the pranic body.

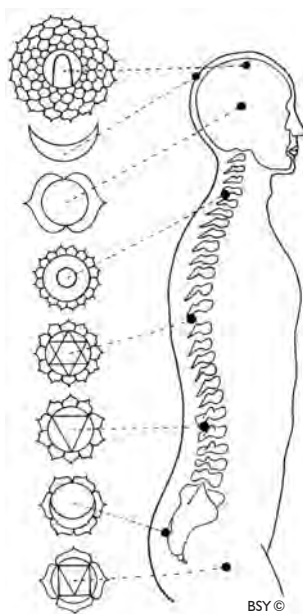
Chakras: the broad dimensions of pranamaya kosha

Chakras are centres of energy or psychic centres. Physically they are nerve plexuses: specific points in the body where a bunch of nerves come together. In the psychic body they are visualized as vortices of prana. If you have seen a wind vortex or a water vortex and their funnels, the chakras are similar. If you watch a wind vortex in the air, you will find that it manifests and then dissipates. If you watch a water vortex in a river, you will find that it manifests and then dissipates. If you watch yourself, you can also observe that a chakra manifests and then dissipates.

The chakra represents the interaction of prana shakti with annamaya kosha and manomaya kosha, at different frequencies, grades of purity, awareness, or even the

level of acquired ability to have mastery over a state or condition. It is possible to develop the control where you can stop your thoughts and become blank. That control is an acquired ability.

Mooladhara chakra represents a down-to-earth awareness and material interaction of the senses with sense objects. Recognition of sense objects and identification with them is the mooladhara awareness. If you come up to manipura, there is a reduction of sensory awareness and increase in the mental awareness. Now you can observe your traits, tendencies, habits and patterns of behaviour that are a result of your samskaras and karmas and your inner conditions of fear, insecurity and desire.



The higher you go, you are less aware of the physical dimension and more aware of the energetic dimension. You no longer see people as physical bodies, you see them as walking beings of light. The level changes, perceptions change, understanding changes, you come higher. You come to anahata, and suddenly you begin to behave like a beating heart. Your whole behaviour corresponds to the sentiment or understanding of the mood that you are living. When you come to vishuddhi, you behave as if you have grown wings and are flying in bliss. The whole understanding, awareness and intellect changes according to the chakra that is active at a particular moment. The energy changes, the consciousness changes, the mind changes and the physical responses of the senses also change.

The chakras represent the broad experience of pranamaya kosha. They represent the broad dimensions where you can experience the mooladhara level, the swadhisthana

level, the manipura level, and so on. You can experience the refinement of your own mind, consciousness and energy.

Creating positive circuits

I was telling you about Swami Sivananda's statement on pratipaksha bhavana: when negative thoughts come, always bring in an opposite positive thought. A thought comes, 'The person is bad.' Let it come only once and then change the thought, 'The person appears to be bad.' Instead of denying or negating the thought and saying, 'The person is good,' you can soften it by saying, 'The person appears to be bad.' When you deny, there is always a struggle. Therefore, soften that by thinking, 'The person appears to be bad.' It is neither a denial nor acceptance. Someone appears to be bad, so further behaviours and actions will define whether your understanding of their appearing bad or good is correct or incorrect.

When you change the negative into a neutral or positive thought, the negative is not reinforced. It does not create a circuit in your brain that reinforces negativity. It does not create a pranic circuit that would have led you to experience the negative aspects of a chakra; instead, you are able to experience the positive aspects of the chakra. This is an important aspect of pratipaksha bhavana. People don't realize it; they think of it as moral teachings.

Why is it so difficult to be naturally good? The moment you try to be good, you become moral and upright. You cannot be naturally good; you have to be morally good, and if you are not that then you cannot maintain your goodness. This happens as the positive circuitry is not created. The more you think, 'The person is bad, the person is bad, the person is bad,' the more hate you build up inside your own mind. You turn your own prana into a weapon of hate and downfall rather than an instrument of your upliftment and cultivation of spiritual awareness. You are reinforcing and strengthening the negative, tamasic circuit. Thoughts are an integral part of neuroplasticity, they decide your behaviour

and responses. This is an interaction between energy, matter and the outcome: a mood or behaviour.

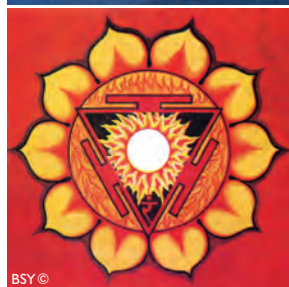
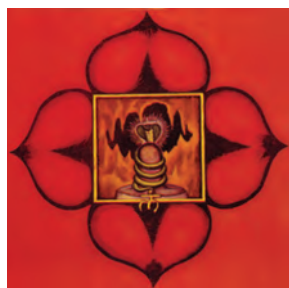
Whenever you reject something positive, you are strengthening something negative and becoming more negative. If you scream at somebody by saying, “Don’t talk to me! I have nothing to do with you!” you are enforcing the negative in you rather than recognizing the effort another person is putting in to do something. The more you think like that, the more negative you will become. Your aura will turn dark, your behaviour will become bad, your actions will become reactive, your moods will be destructive, and your life will be hell. Anything and everything will be the cause of your dissatisfaction and discontentment. These are the circuits you develop in your brain.

When Swami Sivananda says, “Whenever you think of something negative, think ten good things,” it means that you have to enforce the positive ten times more. When you feel, ‘I hate this person’, then say to yourself, ‘I love this person’ ten times over. By the tenth time, you will be laughing and smiling all the way and the dislike will be far gone. When you are able to change a negative by enforcing a positive ten times over, is it only a change of a thought or an idea? No. It is a change of a pranic circuit, and this can make your mind lighter.

The pratipaksha bhavana of Swami Sivananda can definitely induce the positive state of a chakra. In one of your meditations, try to think of liking a person whom you dislike, see if you can change that circuit of dislike into like. The negative circuits are created on a daily basis but you don’t change them. By acknowledging and consciously changing the idea, the thought, the intensity and force of prana, it is possible to change the circuit. The result is that instead of disliking or hating somebody, you begin to like and love that person.

The cauldron of chakras

The chakras are a dimension where many items are put in the cauldron in one go and mixed there. Yoga has given a clear understanding of how many ingredients there are in each



mix of the soup. Mooladhara chakra has four petals so four ingredients, swadhisthana chakra has six petals so six ingredients, manipura chakra has ten petals so ten ingredients. The pot or cauldron is the chakra; you put one litre of water in it: one item, you add salt: the second item, you add tomatoes: the third item, you put turmeric powder: the fourth item. The pot is making one litre of soup, and you put one litre of water but you do not put one kilo of salt, only one tablespoon. You put maybe three or four tomatoes, not one kilo. Similarly, you put maybe a pinch of turmeric powder, not more.

The four items in the pot are of different intensities. The four circuits that flow in the mooladhara chakra are of different frequencies. Similarly, the other chakras contain many different frequencies. Each frequency is identified by a mantra and each petal represents a nadi. It

has been stated that there are seventy-two thousand nadis throughout the whole body, spread like a net, and they are the conductors of prana shakti. Out of the seventy-two thousand, ten are important. Out of the ten, three are important. Out of three, one is most important. From seventy-two thousand peripherals we come to one central one. Each of these seventy-two thousand peripherals responds to a different sound frequency, *spandan*. The letters that you see on the petals of chakras indicate these frequencies.

The nadis can also be influenced by movements in other areas of the body. For example, in jnana mudra or chin mudra, a pranic circuit is being created which is a circle. By

this, the emissions of the index finger and the thumb are not being wasted, they are being recycled. The nadi or nerve of the index finger and its transmission of prana is activating the nadi of the thumb and intensifying the prana in the thumb. That particular nadi is connected to a chakra and to an organ of the body, and therefore they are also activated.

The theory of acupuncture and acupressure is similar. You can get rid of your headache by pressing the base of your toe or the base of your thumb, the extremities that discharge prana. Thus, the practice of a mudra is altering and influencing matter, energy and the result. This is annamaya, the sensorial or matter dimension; pranamaya, the energy dimension; and manomaya, the dimension of the result. Different mudras affect different nadis, physical organs and chakras.

The preliminary practice

In order to experience the subtlety and depth of mudras and bandhas, there is one practice which is most important: nadi shodhana pranayama. Before going into the practices of mudras and bandhas, nadi shodhana pranayama has to be mastered as it purifies the nadis, rebalances the sensorial and the motor systems, the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems, opens the flows of ida and pingala, and allows lung-volume capacity to develop.

Greater lung-volume capacity allows you to take more air into your lungs, which in turn allows greater absorption of oxygen and negative ions, giving you the ability to retain the breath for a longer time, beyond the usual ten seconds. The ability to retain the breath should gradually increase from ten seconds to twenty seconds, so that in one minute you only inhale once, hold the breath once and exhale once. Ultimately, that should become the ratio: 20:20:20, one minute-one breath. When you practise the mudras and bandhas with this ratio in pranayama, they become a powerful tool to awaken and stimulate the chakras leading you to another level of experience of the pranic dimension.

Realize the importance of mudras

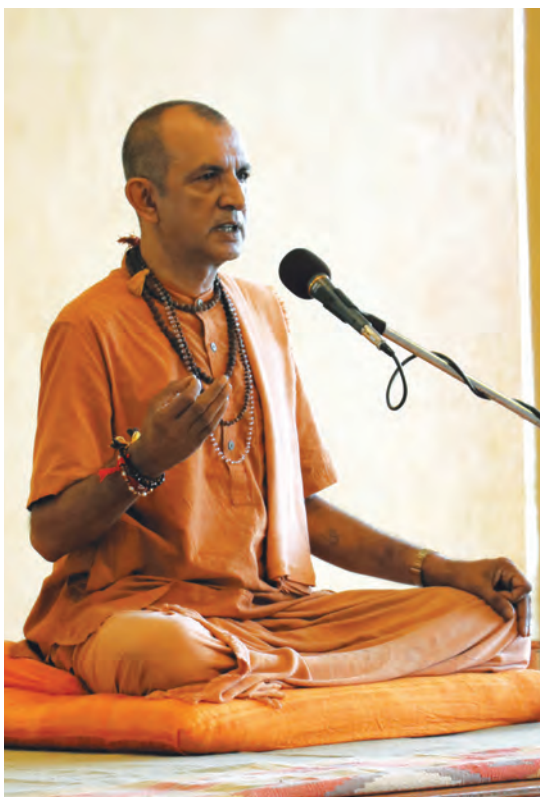
Mudras create neural connections, energy connections and sensorial connections. The brain is able to re-wire itself with the practice of mudras and bandhas. People are now writing books about re-wiring the brain and neuroplasticity, yet the understanding of neuroplasticity and re-wiring the brain has been there in the pranic science of yoga, specifically in regard to mudras.

Mudras, therefore, are an important aspect of yoga. As they are so simple, most people are not interested in them. If I ask you to practise surya namaskara, you will be happy. If I ask you to sit with your fingers in jnana or chin mudra for fifteen minutes, you will say, “What is this?” You will not realize that this practice is more beneficial for you than the dynamic movements of surya namaskara, for it helps you to change your neural circuits and re-wire your brain, so that a deep transformation of the personality can take place.



Widening the Understanding

25 April 2018



There is a lot of similarity between the Chinese system of Qi and the Indian system of prana. Most of the old cultures in the world believed in the existence of the pranic body and also in other subtle bodies such as the astral body

and the causal body. The old cultures also had traditions of meditation in which one could leave the physical body, move into the astral body and travel through the astral body. This connection with the astral and pranic bodies, which our ancestors had in the past, does not exist anymore in today's environment. Our ancestors were more in tune with the energies and understood how to regulate them. In the present times people are more concerned with how to strengthen and enforce the sensory needs and expressions.

People today find it difficult to believe in something like prana or Qi, yet in the ancient cultural context this was a common subject that people looked into and experimented with, and they were able to experience the awakening of this dormant subtle power. The ancient cultures were more of self-discovery cultures, where people enquired, 'What is happening in myself, in my body, in my mind, in my energy system? Can that be regulated, channelled, controlled?' Both the Chinese and Indian cultures allowed people to look inside, meditate and contemplate.

The Asian philosophies, thoughts and ideas evolved in relation to the experience of life that we all live as individuals. In the western countries, the thrust of enquiry was not self-oriented or introspective; it was based more on the survival instinct. Therefore, the western civilization attained mastery in the external fields such as development of societies, armament, medicine, agriculture. It did not focus on the component that allows one to connect with the inner self. Of course, the old western cultures did have this awareness; the Druids, the Celts, and the old tribes in Europe had a strong spiritual culture. They were aware of the energies and powers that are natural, cosmic and also self-generated.

The old cultures believed in things that were non-material: the energies and the spirit-oriented concepts and ideas. The modern culture has avoided that aspect completely and focused more on sensorial expressions. In the Old Testament of the Bible there are descriptions that indicate experiences of chakra awakening and kundalini

awakening. The removal of the seven veils, which is talked about in Ezekiel, represents an understanding and awareness that there is something beyond the material and the physical in the dimension of energy and higher experiences. It was this search that prompted people to investigate different methods and techniques by which the energy could be accessed.

Indian and Chinese systems of energy

There are two aspects of energy: one is the material, the other is the subtle. In the material aspect the energy is used for therapeutic purposes and in the spiritual aspect the energy is used for opening the dormant psychic centres. The difference between the Indian and the Chinese traditions is that the Indian traditions have used both the spiritual and the therapeutic in relation to prana, and there is a whole group of practices dealing with prana shakti: pranayama, mudra, bandha, prana nidra, prana vidya. In the Chinese system, prana is used more for therapeutic purposes: to remove imbalances from the channels and overcome specific conditions, whether headache, sinusitis, or something else.

Similarly, there are trends that have come from Japan. A few years ago Reiki became a big hit. Everybody around the world was trying to become a Reiki master and the Reiki masters made millions making other people into Reiki masters. Now the whole motivation and attachment to Reiki is gone, people don't even know what it is anymore. The reason for this craze was the healing and therapeutic effect of Reiki. As the Chinese and Japanese systems have focused more on therapy, you will find that their description of meridians and pressure or puncture points are precise and accurate.

Indians did not focus on the therapeutic use. They maintained the awareness that prana can be applied for therapy, yet they did not go into specifics like influencing one particular meridian to overcome your headache, another meridian to help you with your sinuses, etc. That specific knowledge developed in other Asian countries.

The Chinese system of meridians is close to the nadi system of yoga. There are eight main meridians in the body which control every function, and there are ten main nadis which control every function. If acupuncture is looking at eight main meridians which in all their varieties and forms manage the entire body, then ten nadis from the yogic perspective also manage the entire body functions and they can be correlated to the acupuncture meridians.

The gradual development of chakra understanding

The concept of chakras first came as centres of energy in the body, and then came the specifics. I gave you an example yesterday that when you cook a meal, every ingredient has a different proportion; it can be one tablespoon of salt, one litre of water, two cups of rice. For a meal to be cooked well, everything should not be in the same measure. If you put everything in the same measure, you will end up with an inedible meal.

Just as there is a ratio for everything in order to make tasty food, there is a ratio in a chakra as well. That ratio is defined in the petals. If one petal represents one litre of water, the other petal may represent one teaspoon of salt. The qualities of the convergent nadis within a chakra are different. These convergent nadis are symbolically depicted as petals of a flower.

The understanding of the qualities of the convergent nadis represents the development of the awareness of the specifics. First came the awareness of chakras as centres of energy and then came the awareness of what is on top, at the bottom, at the right and at the left. First the form was created, then it was identified: this is the top, this is the bottom, this is the right, this is the left, and then the frequencies governing the different nadis were placed. Further on, the emissions of the chakra were observed and the paths of their flows to specific organs of the body were discovered, resulting in understanding how these flows create either balance and harmony or imbalance and disharmony. Then it was found that by performing

certain gestures, it is possible to redirect or re-channel this energy. Thus the science of mudras came about.

Activating minor chakras

Before mudras, however, came the system of bandhas. These were the first practices, as bandhas deal with the chakras directly: one block, another block, third block. At once you are activating three levels of chakras through the three bandhas. Then, with the help of mudras you go into the specifics of how to maintain harmony, balance and equilibrium during the activation of pranic energy. This understanding of chakras through mudras gave birth to the understanding of the minor chakras in the body.

The six or seven main chakras deal with human evolution. They refine the human mind, the human energy, the human consciousness. There are other chakras which become active only to power a particular sensorial activity. They secrete chemicals and hormones in minute quantities, which can be used either for health and wellbeing or for death and destruction. These minor centres are situated all over the body, more specifically at the extremities such as the tip of the nose, the earlobes, the point of the chin, and also above vishuddhi chakra. There are many of these points of energy in the body, which are similar to the acupuncture points in nature, quality and attributes.

Sometimes people get confused when they read about chakras, as different books give different numbers. Going by the logic that chakras deal with the evolution of consciousness, there are six: mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi and ajna. They go from the earth element at mooladhara up to the mind element, *manas*, in ajna. They are for your growth and evolution. Sahasrara is the seventh one, and it is a state of being. Those who are established in sahasrara do not swing from one state to another according to a mood. One state of transcendental awareness is maintained; that state is constant, unbroken and continuous. Sahasrara is the final chakra. If you attain

it, there is no returning back. In the lower six chakras, which belong to the process of evolution, you can fluctuate.

Then there are minor chakras. Bindu, for example, is a minor chakra. Lalana, nasikagra are other minor chakras. However, they are minor only from the broad understanding of chakras. They are subtle centres that can have a profound impact on the physical, mental and psychic levels. You begin to activate these centres and develop their understanding with the help of mudras such as khechari and vipareeta karani. This you do in hatha yoga. Then, when you move into the higher yogas of kriya and kundalini, there are many other practices that take you deeper into their experience.

Turning on the switches

Mudras work as switches. In your childhood some of you might have experienced that if you put your finger near the forehead there used to be a tickling sensation. As an adult you don't experience it anymore, but as a child it was a strong sensation, and you could maintain that sensation continuously until you diverted the mind. This is an example of stimulating a chakra which is in the frontal region of the forehead. It is not ajna chakra, it is another chakra. Similarly, all other minor chakras are affected by gestures.

In *Kundalini Tantra*, Sri Swami Satyananda says that one should not be confused if the practice of awakening a chakra seems to be totally contrary to what you would imagine. For example, if you are trying to activate ajna chakra, you work with your mooladhara. Or if you are trying to awaken your mooladhara, you use the trigger which is in ajna. Just as fans are here but the switch is somewhere else, in this body also the fan and the switch are not side by side. Action happens in a chakra, though the switch is in some other place. For example, shambhavi mudra, eyebrow-centre gazing, is practised for mooladhara chakra. Whenever you are practising shambhavi mudra, you are turning on the switch for mooladhara. The switch is at the eyebrow centre and the bulb is down there in mooladhara.



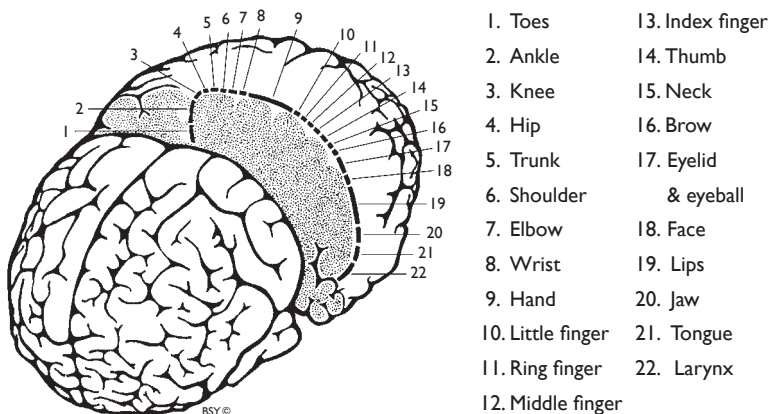
In the same way, when you perform chin mudra, it affects a minor centre in the lungs, improving respiration. It also affects a minor chakra in the nape of the neck, allowing you to focus and concentrate. When you perform prana mudra, with the index and little finger extending out and the tips of the middle and ring fingers and the thumb together, you activate the prana vayu. When you feel depleted of energy, practise this mudra. When you return home from office exhausted and want to be quiet for five minutes, at that time practise prana mudra while focusing on your breath from manipura to vishuddhi. In five minutes your energy level will go up and you will feel ready to roll for a few more hours without any exhaustion.

There are mudras for each of the pancha pranas and they all affect different chakras. Prana mudra activates anahata chakra, apana mudra activates swadhisthana chakra, samana mudra activates manipura chakra, and so on.

Changing ‘the little man’

The micro impulses that travel to the brain while you are practising mudras help to stimulate a particular part of the brain called ‘the little man’, the homunculus. If you see a picture of the brain in one of our books, you will find that names of different body parts are written against different parts of the brain. Some parts are small but their corresponding area in the brain is huge. For example, the thumb is a tiny part of the body, yet in the brain it covers a large area, for the thumb is extremely sensitive and receptive.

Cross Section of the Brain



Try an experiment: place two pins one or two millimetres apart on your thumb and prick gently. Even if they are one millimetre apart, you will feel two pricks, not one. Now put the two pins on your back where there are less nerve endings. Place them one inch or two inches away from each other and again prick. You will feel that prick as one. This shows the sensitivity of different organs and their connection with the brain.

The homunculus, the little man inside your brain, is a deformed man, not like you. You are well-proportionate but this little one inside is totally deformed: the fingers are huge, the hand is big, the other parts of the body are

invisible. That is because the areas of the body that respond to sensory stimulations and your cognitive faculties are more highlighted in the brain. In fact, that is another way of understanding mudras.

When you are practising chin mudra or jnana mudra, it is altering the behaviour of the region of the thumb in your brain. The different finger regions of the brain have different functions, which can cover and control art, mathematics, logic, and so on. You can go into the specifics and discover which centre is responsible for which kind of behaviour, and accordingly experiment with mudras.

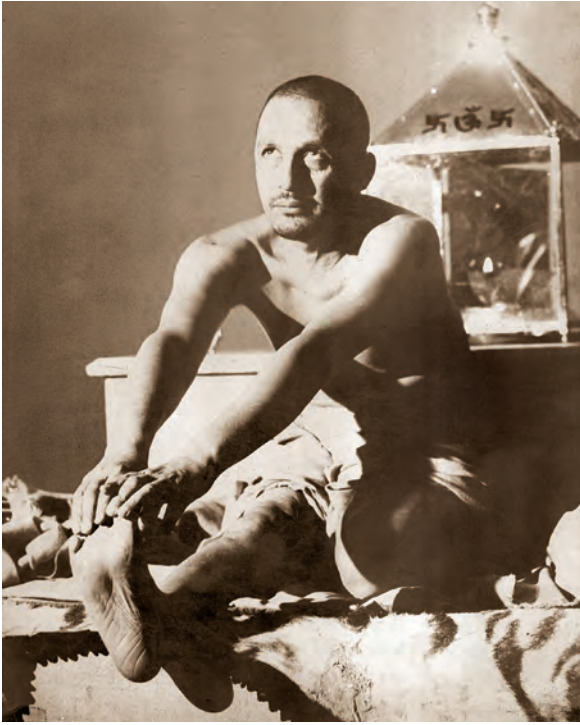
In perspective

The whole subject of mudras and bandhas is a small part of yoga, yet the way it has been placed among the practices of yoga shows how important mastery of mudra and bandha is for progress to higher levels of yoga practice. Mudras and bandhas have to be mastered before you go to raja yoga. If hatha yoga is the primary class and raja yoga is the secondary class, then all these aspects of hatha yoga have to be mastered before you can move into raja yoga.

From this perspective, learning yoga in the tradition is not a whimsical learning. You do not do ten asanas today, add a few more stretches and a pranayama the next day, a few more stretches and a relaxation practice the following day. That is your need. The sadhana of yoga follows a different path and process altogether. The sadhana of yoga cannot be taught to the public as practices that people can do in their daily life. It can only be taught to people with pure intention and the commitment to experience higher yoga.

Mudra Sadhana

26 April 2018



The general understanding is that mudra and bandha are two different categories of yogic practices, and the two words 'mudra' and 'bandha' also seem to indicate two different processes of activating prana shakti. In reality, bandhas are a group of mudras, there is no separate categorization of bandha.

Purpose of classification of mudras

The grouping of mudras is interesting. The first group is known as *kaya mudras*. *Kaya* means the body and here it indicates body postures. These are postural mudras, which are performed in an asana. You assume an asana, and then with the addition of concentration and breathing the asana practice becomes a mudra.

The second group is the *bandha mudras* and this is where the bandhas come from. They are a group in the mudra collection. The third group is *adhara mudras* or the foundation mudras. Foundation mudras generally relate to mooladhara chakra, as mooladhara chakra is the foundation of the body. Then there are *hasta mudras* or hand mudras. They are quite numerous, and their purpose is to redirect and re-channel the energy back into the body. Finally, there are *shirsha mudras* or head mudras, which are used to induce introversion.

Hand mudras redirect the flow of prana shakti through the major nerve meridians back into the body and help to recycle the prana. Head mudras like shambhavi, nasikagra, khechari and bhoochari induce the state of introversion, pratyahara, and they become an aid in meditation. Adhara mudras like ashwini, sahajoli, vajroli, are for mooladhara.

The base mudras change the pranic structure of apana vayu, the downward moving prana shakti. The moment apana vayu begins to flow upwards, the chakras become activated. These five prana shaktis, prana, apana, samana, vyana and udana, move in different directions. Prana is an upward moving force, apana is a downward moving force, samana is a sideways moving force. Looking at the motion prescribed for each prana, you will find that the adhara mudras specifically act on apana vayu. In the normal condition of the chakras, the pranas are functioning in a particular manner. When the chakras are activated and stimulated, the normal functioning of the pranas changes.

If you turn on a light bulb, after a few minutes the glass and the filament will become hot. This is because now power

is flowing through it. The same happens with the pranas. A prana may be moving in a clockwise circular motion; when you awaken a chakra, the movement may become anti-clockwise, horizontal, vertical or lateral. How the prana will change upon activation is not known to people. The apana vayu, the downward moving force, controls the *ojas* or *retas*, the energy required to create life. Therefore, the adhara mudras are much used by yogis for sublimation of the sexual energies when they go into the higher practices of yoga.

With the shirsha mudras, the head mudras, the nerves in the head region are affected. The nerves in the frontal lobe, optical nerves, auditory nerves, are all affected so that the natural functions of the motor and sensory nervous systems are contained. Once the activity of the senses is contained, the mind is not dissipated and diverted, and introversion can take place easily. If you ask a person who is hyperactive to practise shambhavi mudra, eyebrow centre gazing, for three minutes, you will see a marked change in the behaviour. The visual inputs have been stopped, the mind has been quietened, there is less distraction and dissipation, and thus pratyahara sets in.

The different groups of mudras have different purposes. The head mudras are for pratyahara, the adhara mudras are for mooladhara, the kaya mudras are for the whole chakra system, the bandha mudras are specifically for three chakras, and the hasta mudras are for re-channelling the major meridian discharges. This is how the classification of mudras has taken place.

Beginning the sadhana

You have your routine of asana, pranayama, or other practices. Now, one day a week, drop all asanas and pranayamas and only focus on the practice of mudras. You will find that the quality and experience of your practice will change. Even your body will respond differently to prana shakti. The feeling in the trunk and the abdomen will change, the energy level will change, and that oomph will remain with you for a longer period.

What you feel physically is the first level of awareness. It is something that you can identify, 'I am feeling hot.' 'I am feeling hungry.' 'My appetite has improved.' These are external physical conditions that you can observe. Then there are other conditions which are pranic and you have to be more observant of those rather than what you feel in your body. The pranic management is more crucial. At times it happens that people are working away at their desk and suddenly the shift of consciousness takes place. They begin to see everything as luminous: what they are writing is luminous, the hand is luminous, the pen is luminous, the paper is luminous. They become happy, a big smile spreads on their face, they become immersed in this experience of luminosity, and then they lose the grounding of mind.

Generally, this is what happens with the majority of people. They become so engrossed and hypnotized by their own experience, 'I am having this experience, I am becoming spiritual, I am becoming enlightened. My whole body is luminous. Wow!' and the practical connection to life is gone.



Remain grounded

One should not lose the grounding of mind. If the grounding is lost, the practice is incorrect and in that situation the person should immediately stop all practices.

Swami Sivananda used to say that in order to maintain the balance between body, prana and mind, you have to regulate your lifestyle. He has written that one hour of meditation equals four hours of hard work. If you meditate for one hour, to exhaust the prana shakti which you received in meditation, you have to work hard physically for four hours, not just walk out of your meditation, go to your car, drive to the office and start signing your papers. That is not hard work. The condition and nature of the body, prana and mind that have come in have to completely change now.

For this reason, the pranic practices of yoga were kept in seclusion and not made public. The danger is that people forget the sensorial connection with the senses, sense objects and life, and live an imaginary mental situation. Therefore, no instructions in mudras were given publicly, people were taught the practices in a general manner and not encouraged to pursue them deeply. They were only given glimpses: “To prepare for the practice of meditation, sit with your hands in chin or jnana mudra.” The component of mudra was included in meditation in the form of a few hand mudras. The other mudras were cut out completely as the danger was always there for people to lose touch with reality.

If you can overcome this obstacle and remain grounded, then mudra sadhana will become a powerful tool to understand your pranic, psychic and astral bodies.



Practising Mudras

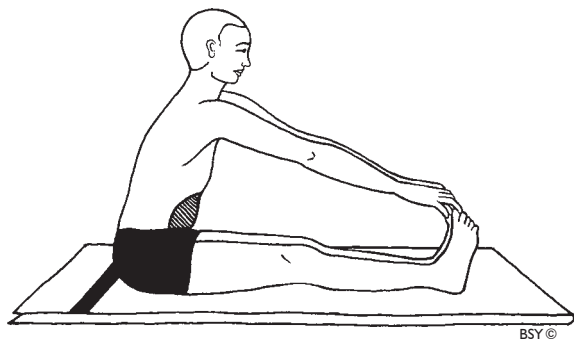
This section is a compilation of the mudras that were practised during the Hatha Yoga Yatra 3. Bear in mind that in the class environment, these practices were combined with other practices as necessary, such as shavasana, pranayama, and asana. The section only provides a glimpse of the experience of mudras as imparted by Swami Niranjana; it is not meant to be used as a teaching tool.

KAYA MUDRAS

Kaya mudras are mudras that are performed in specific physical postures. When you practise normal asanas, you focus more on the physical, muscular movement and the breath; these are the two major areas of perception. Sometimes you can visualize the practice in your mind, and that becomes the third area of perception. When you practise mudra techniques, you have to move your mind away from the physical, material body and experience your body as a pranic body.

The pranic body is experienced as an empty shell, there is only the outer covering of the skin and inside it is hollow. In this hollow space you visualize the movement of prana. Imagine sparks of electricity firing in the dark. In the same manner, you see prana as sparks of electricity in the hollow space of your body. This is the pranamaya sharira visualization.

Whenever you practise mudras, your awareness will not be physical or muscular, or on the breath. You will not even visualize how you are practising the posture with the body. You will have to shift that physical body awareness to pranic body awareness, to pranamaya kosha awareness where the body is seen as an empty shell, an empty balloon. No bones, no muscles, no blood, nothing, just the covering of the skin which separates your inner space from the outer space, and inside the covering of the skin the experience of sparks of light. When you practise the mudras in this way, you will notice the difference in your practice. The experience will be totally different.



Tadagi Mudra

Stage I : To practise tadagi mudra, sit with your legs stretched out in front. Inhale and raise the arms up, exhale and bend forward only so much that you are able to catch hold of your toes, keeping the legs and the spine straight. Holding this posture, pump the abdomen out with inhalation and pump it in with exhalation. As you inhale, expand your tummy out like a barrel, and as you exhale pull your tummy in. Do this movement seven times. When you have completed seven rounds, release the toes, sit upright, relax and breathe normally.

Stage 2: The same movements will be repeated, but this time visualize the flow of your breath along with the movement. When you inhale, the flow of breath is from the toes up the legs into the abdomen; when you exhale, the flow comes up the trunk into the shoulders and then goes down the arms into the toes. Inhaling to the barrel stomach, exhaling through the arms into the toes.

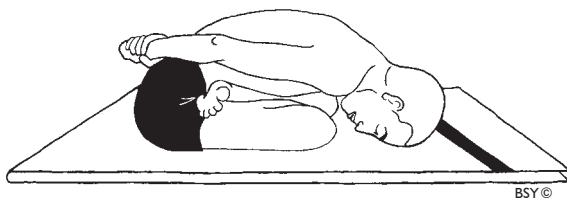
You make a circuit with inhalation and exhalation. Visualize your body as a pranic body while you are making the circuit; the circuit of breath is a circuit of light, of prana shakti.

Practise seven breaths of the circuit, visualizing your body as a pranic body. When you complete, sit upright and relax.

Stage 3: This time, when you are breathing from your toes to the abdominal area, repeat the mantra *Ram* when you reach the abdomen. When you take the awareness to the toes with the exhalation, at that point repeat the mantra *Om*. With inhalation mental repetition of *Ram*, with exhalation mental repetition of *Om*. *Ram-Om*, *Ram-Om*, do this for seven breaths. When you complete, come back to the centre and relax.

SWAN tip

In tadagi mudra, the primary focus is in manipura chakra. The kaya mudras focus on the chakras whereas the other mudras focus more on channels or meridians. When you are in tadagi mudra, expanding the abdomen and contracting it, you stimulate all the nerves of the abdominal area, the manipura region. The production of prana increases in the body with this practice, as it has an immediate effect on manipura chakra.



Yoga Mudra

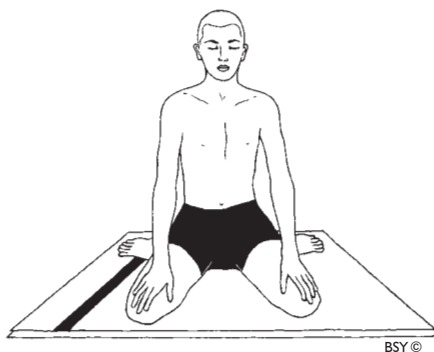
Stage 1: To practise yoga mudra, sit in padmasana, the lotus posture. Interlock the fingers behind the back. Inhale, then exhaling bend over the right knee so the forehead touches the floor, inhale up, exhale over the left knee, inhale up, exhale down to the centre, stay down breathing normally. Then breathing in, come up, and relax. This is one round. Practise two rounds.

Stage 2: Now, during the practice, visualize your pranic body and see the exchange of prana shakti between the trunk and the knee, where they touch each other. Practise three rounds.

When you complete, stretch the legs out in front and bump the knees up and down.

SWAN tips:

- After each round, change the leg in padmasana: the one that was up should come down and the one that was down should come up. You are likely to find it easier to do the practice with one particular leg on top, but you should practise with both. Gradually your head will touch the floor.
- Practise the butterfly pose before this practice to loosen up the hip muscles.
- The focus is on manipura chakra in yoga mudra.



Manduki Mudra

For manduki mudra, you have to first sit in vajrasana. Then separate the knees and the feet, and try to extend the feet out with the toes pointing out. The hands rest on the knees.

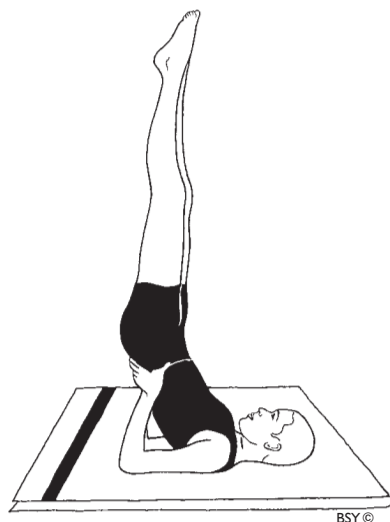
In this posture, breathing in raise the head slightly and look up at the eyebrow centre in shambhavi mudra. Breathing out, gently bring the head back to centre and gaze at the nose tip in nasikagra mudra. Practise 10 rounds.

When you finish, close your eyes and relax your whole body while maintaining the posture. Become aware of all sensations in the body. Become aware of the physical stillness and the inner silence.

When you are ready, slowly open your eyes, stretch the legs out in front, bump the knees up and down and then contract and release your kneecaps to release the tension.

SWAN tips:

- If there is too much pressure on your hips and buttocks during the practice, you can put a cushion or blanket under your buttocks.
- The breathing should be slow, long and deep.
- When you sit in manduki asana, the focus is on the area of mooladhara, which is also aided with the practice of nasikagra drishti. Shambhavi mudra activates ajna chakra, which is also the switch for mooladhara.



Vipareeta Karani Mudra

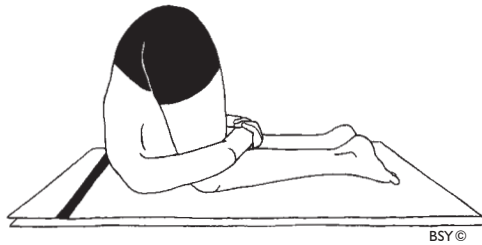
Lie down on your back in shavasana to perform this mudra. Bring the feet together, hands beside the body to support the body. Inhale and raise the legs, then push your hips off the floor and support your buttocks with your hands, toes in one straight line with the eyes. The trunk is not straight but bent at about forty-five degrees and the legs are not vertical but at an angle so the toes are in one straight line with the eyes.

Breathing normally, hold this pose. Focus on your breath moving from the navel to the eyebrow centre. When you are inhaling, feel your breath move from manipura chakra to ajna chakra. When you are exhaling, feel the breath move from ajna chakra to manipura chakra. Focus on your breath moving from the navel to the throat centre. When you are inhaling, feel your breath move from manipura chakra to vishuddhi chakra. When you are exhaling, feel the breath move from vishuddhi chakra to manipura chakra.

From vipareeta karani, we will go directly into pashinee mudra, so you don't have to release the posture.

SWAN tips:

- Two kaya mudras are inversion practices. The first is vipareeta karani. *Vipareeta* means reverse, *karani* means to perform, so *vipareeta karani* is to perform a reverse posture.
- Vipareeta karani is considered an asana when it is done without breath and chakra awareness. It becomes a mudra when you combine it with breath, chakra and mantra awareness. It is also the first practice in the kriya yoga system. Although it looks simple, it has a far-reaching effect in internalizing the mind.
- Vipareeta karani mudra affects vishuddhi chakra. Therefore, when you are practising it as a mudra, your area of movement is from the navel to vishuddhi chakra.

**Pashinee Mudra**

From the posture of vipareeta karani, slowly bend your knees, and try to place your knees near your ears. If you cannot do this comfortably, do not push. Those who can should then lock the arms around the knees. In this posture, breathe normally.

To release the posture, first release the arms, then stretch out the legs while supporting the back, bring the hips down to the floor, and lie down in shavasana.

SWAN tips:

- Pashinee mudra is the second inverted kaya mudra following from vipareeta karani mudra. *Pash* means a noose or lasso, so the body looks like a lasso in this mudra.

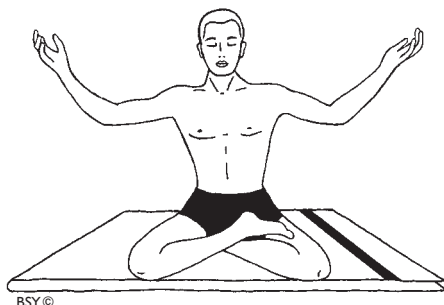
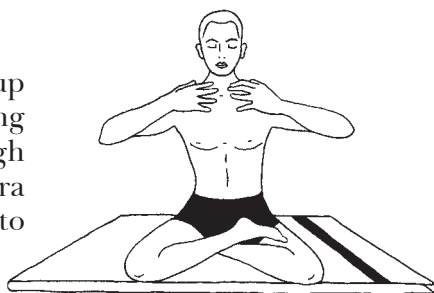
- In pashinee mudra, the whole focus is on mooladhara chakra. The awareness of manipura and vishuddhi is also there, yet the primary awareness is of mooladhara.

Prana Mudra



For practising prana mudra, you have to sit in swastikasana. Sitting comfortably, bring the toes out in-between the thigh and the calf muscles. Hold both hands in bhairava mudra, one on top of the other on top of the heels.

Now slowly raise the hands up to the throat level, visualizing the breath moving through the chakras from mooladhara to manipura to anahata to vishuddhi.



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Spread the arms out to the sides, feeling the breath and the prana move to ajna, bindu and sahasrara. While exhaling, slowly bring the hands back down in bhairava mudra, feeling the prana progressively descend down the chakras. Relax the whole body and breathe normally.

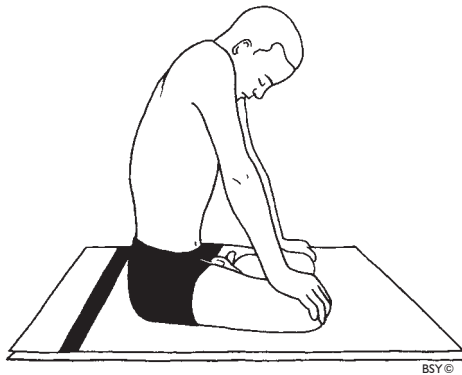
BANDHA MUDRAS

Whenever there is stress or tension in the muscles of the body, three regions tighten up naturally and spontaneously. One is the region of the neck and shoulders. They are under heavy stress and vishuddhi is affected by this. Jalandhara bandha is an antidote to the stress in the neck and shoulders.

The second area to be affected by stress is the abdominal region. Under extreme stress and tension, you tighten your abdomen. That also happens naturally and spontaneously; it is a natural lock that occurs. Uddiyana bandha is the antidote for that.

The third area is the perineum; you contract the perineum when under stress. It is like withdrawing into a shell. Moola bandha is used as the antidote for that.

These are the main bandhas influencing the three main areas of tension in your physical and pranic bodies. They are included as mudras in the system of mudras. The bandha mudras also include maha mudra and maha vedha mudra.



Jalandhara Bandha

In order to practise the bandhas, you have to sit in a comfortable cross-legged posture. It can be sukhāsana, swastikasana, siddhasana, whichever pose you are comfortable in. The hips should be higher than the

knees, as you need to press down the knees and lift your shoulders up.

Stage 1: Sit in a comfortable posture, hands on the knees, eyes closed. First breathe in deeply. The longer you can make the breath, the easier it will be to practise the bandha. Hold the breath in, press down on the knees with your hands, raise the shoulders, bring the chin down. Exert pressure in the neck, focus on vishuddhi chakra, and remain there for the count of ten. Then, releasing the bandha, bring the head up while relaxing the shoulders, and breathe out long and deep. Take three normal breaths. This is one round of the practice. Practise two more rounds.

Stage 2: Next, when you are practising jalandhara bandha and focusing on vishuddhi chakra, visualize vishuddhi as a vortex of light in your pranic body. While you are observing that vortex of light, mentally say the bija mantra of vishuddhi, *Ham*, ten times. Instead of counting numbers, say *Ham, Ham, Ham* in your mind, and with each mantra see the expansion of vishuddhi chakra: a flaring of vishuddhi chakra with every *Ham*. Practise three rounds.

Agnisara Kriya

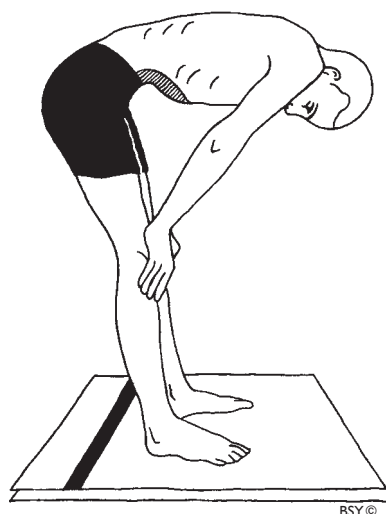
In order to prepare for uddiyana bandha you need to practise a kriya known as agnisara kriya. The practice is done standing up.

While standing with feet shoulder-width apart, the knees slightly bent, hands on top of the knees, bend the body forward and exhale completely.

Hold the breath out and pump the abdomen in and out ten times.

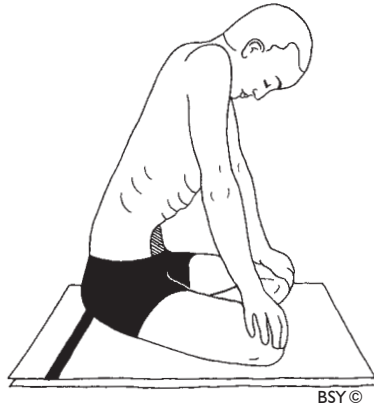
After ten times, stop, stand up, and then inhale and exhale. This is one round. Practise six rounds.

When you have completed, sit down in a cross-legged posture.



SWAN tips:

- The movement of the abdomen is not a rapid movement. It can become rapid, but it does not begin as a rapid movement; it starts with a controlled pumping effect. You are pushing the abdomen out and pulling it in consciously, wilfully. It is not a rapid, uncontrolled movement, but a controlled contraction and pushing out of the abdominal muscles.
- Do not come up while inhaling but always stand up and then inhale.
- *Agni* means fire, *sara* means to vent the fire. Just as when you give more oxygen to the fire so it burns brighter and hotter, in the same manner agnisara kriya is used to activate manipura chakra and the prana generation there.



Uddiyana Bandha

Uddiyana bandha is performed while you are sitting, using the same method of raising the shoulders and pressing down the knees as in jalandhara bandha. However, it is performed with external retention.

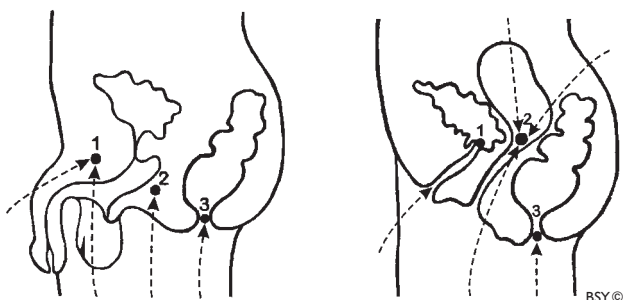
Breathe in long and deep, then breathe out through the mouth and completely empty the lungs.

Holding the breath out, raise the shoulders, pull the abdomen in and then pull it up.

Hold for ten seconds, then release the abdomen down and push it out.

Sit upright and breathe normally. Practise three rounds.

SWAN tip: When you contract the abdomen, it is done in two parts: first you pull in and then you pull up. Similarly, when you release, you don't just relax the abdomen, you again do it in two parts: push down and then push out. Try to focus on this dual movement of the abdomen during the practice.



Moola Bandha

The third bandha mudra is the perineal contraction, moola bandha. The area to be contracted is the physical trigger point of the mooladhara chakra (No. 2 in diagrams). This has a slightly different location in men and women.

For males: in the perineum, between the anus and the sexual organ.

For females: at the cervix, where the vagina and the uterus meet.

Moola bandha is often done incorrectly by contraction of the anus (No. 3 in diagrams). Try to find the exact location and apply the contraction at that point during moola bandha.

Those people who find moola bandha too difficult, perhaps through lack of control over the perineum muscles, should regularly practise ashwini mudra instead. When you develop more control over the perineum muscles, then you should leave ashwini mudra and perform moola bandha instead.

Maha Mudra and Maha Bheda Mudra

Maha mudra is a combination of jalandhara bandha, the throat lock, and moola bandha, the perineal lock. In many books you will find that maha mudra is practised with only moola bandha, and that is a simpler variation of the practice.

Stage 1: Sit with your legs straight out in the front, then bring the right foot close to the body and place its heel near the perineum. You are actually sitting on your heel. Place both hands on the left knee.

Inhale deeply, hold the breath, stretch out and hold your left toes with both hands.

Keeping the spine straight, practise jalandhara bandha and moola bandha.

Hold for ten seconds, then release moola bandha, release jalandhara bandha, exhale, and come up. Take a few normal breaths.

This is one round. Practise two more rounds.

Change the leg, and do three rounds of the practice with the right leg stretched out.

Stage 2: This time take your awareness to mooladhara and vishuddhi chakras along the spinal passage. While you are holding the breath and counting to 10, bring your awareness up from mooladhara, step by step, in ten steps to vishuddhi, and then release.

Practise two rounds with each leg.

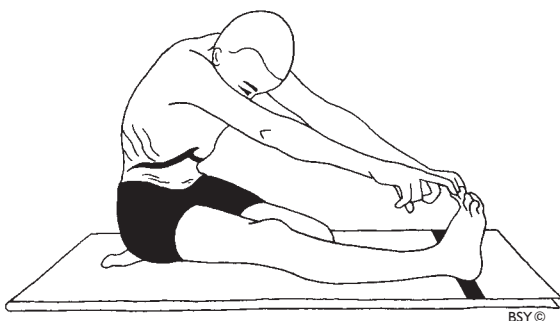
Stage 3: Now we move into maha bheda mudra, which includes uddiyana bandha as well. Holding the breath out, you practise the three bandhas when you are bent forward.

Inhale, then exhale out completely and bend forward.

Practise jalandhara, uddiyana, moola, count to 10.

Release moola, uddiyana, jalandhara, return to centre, inhale and relax, and take a few normal breaths.

Practise two rounds with each leg.



Stage 4: This time, instead of counting the numbers, mentally say the names of the chakras: mooladhara-manipura-vishuddhi, mooladhara-manipura-vishuddhi, mooladhara-manipura-vishuddhi, when you are holding the bandhas. Each time you say the name of a chakra, take your mind to that specific chakra and become aware of the bandha in the chakra region. Practise two rounds with each leg.

SHIRSHA MUDRAS

There are many mudras that influence the nadis in the head region, such as shanmukhi, shambhavi, nasikagra drishti, khechari, bhoochari. We will take up only one of them, shanmukhi mudra.

Shanmukhi Mudra

With shanmukhi mudra, you close the six doors of outer perception. *Shat* means six and *mukha* means gates or faces. Therefore, it is the gesture with which you close the six doors of outer perception.

With the thumb you close the ears so that no sound comes in, the index fingers are held over the eyes, the middle fingers are held over the nostrils, the ring and the little fingers are held over the lips. The ears are plugged, the eyes are closed, the lips are closed. The nostrils are open when you practise bhramari pranayama in this mudra.



However, when it is used for complete introversion and listening to inner sounds, *nada*, then the nostrils are also closed and inner retention practised.

IMPRESSIONS OF PARTICIPANTS



This yatra added one more piece in the whole picture of hatha yoga. But the bigger part of the picture we will see when we start practising what we have learned. This week very clearly we have experienced the importance of two basic things regarding the learning process in yoga.

First is undoubtedly the presence and the guidance of the guru. Many practices we have considered known to us were filled with deeper meaning and understanding. Swamiji's satsangs revealed to us new details about the mudras and bandhas and their effects on the gross and subtle bodies. In the second place is the importance of regular personal sadhana in order to progress in the learning process.

—*Sannyasi Sumitra, Bulgaria*

Making the time and effort to attend the Hatha Yoga Yatra 3 and completing the hatha programs brings a big sense of gratitude and happiness. The main principles, mudras and bandhas, bring one from the gross to the subtle level, connecting with the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual bodies. Through the guidance of Swami Niranjana, we travelled down this path.

Foundations were set by daily practices of asana and pranayama specifically influenced by the hatha yoga sequence of mudras and bandhas. The barest of movement through mudras bringing you gently yet with powerful effects to the pranic body allowed imbalances to be cleared and released, leaving a sense of light and expansion in the deepest realms within.

Fountains of knowledge, wisdom and truth were given during the daily satsangs – deepening this foundation and leaving no questions unanswered. The love and respect that surrounded the satsangs was flowing lightly and brightly. A pleasure to witness and be part of.

The journey from Hatha Yoga 1 to Hatha Yoga 3 has unfolded many levels. Some challenging times allowed me to experience the depth and power of hatha yoga practices. Often it is in harder times that we will see the truth, the light and the power of yoga vidya.

Sincerely thanking for the continuous structure, support and welcome and for allowing the space for this unfolding. Turning the negative to positive will also be tucked under my belt.

—*Eilish Murray Brady, Ireland*

I feel blessed being part of Hatha Yoga Yatra 3. In my view, this module is a must for all who have started their journey of hatha yoga from the Bihar School of Yoga. It has opened the door for a different level of yogic awareness and experiences. With the blessings of Swamiji, all the complex concepts of prana, chakra, mudras and bandhas were easily understood. It was a great learning experience for me.

—*Raja Verma, Assam*

Hatha Yoga Yatra 3 has been a wonderful experience. Practising how to perform mudras and bandhas in the right way and the importance of working with prana shakti to prepare the whole body for the higher practices was a

great opportunity for me together with the yoga nidra and meditation practices. Being in the presence of Swamiji and the flow of the rhythms of the ashram, I felt I was more alive and content with myself just being here for a few days.

After so many years of learning, practising and teaching yoga, it is like discovering for the first time the good that yoga can do when we believe in it and we are ready. Thank you, Swamiji, for the inspiration, blessings and making the path light for us.

—Sannyasi Satmarga, Spain



Notes

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Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

At the World Yoga Convention held in 2013 on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, Swami Niranjanananda announced: “The first chapter of yoga propagation is over. Now the second chapter begins, which is focused on consolidation of yoga and better application of yoga, with sincerity, seriousness and commitment.”

In writing the second chapter, a complete change in the training programs at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth has come about since 2016. The new programs are setting a standard of understanding the practices and principles of yoga from the perspective of the original intentions of yoga.

Among these programs was Hatha Yoga Yatra 3: Mudra and Bandha. The focus here was on understanding the role and purpose of mudras and bandhas and experiencing their subtle influence on the pranic body, the pranamaya kosha.

This book presents the satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda during the program.



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